

Contribution to the History of Greek and Bulgarian Speleology
(Dedicated to the 40-th Anniversary of Bulgarian-Greek Speleological Relations -
1965–2005)

**Historical Review of the Cooperation between Bulgarian and Greek
Cavers**

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The development of the friendly relationships between the Bulgarian and Greek speleologists has almost half-century history. In the context of contacts among the speleologists and speleological organizations from all over the world, the relations between cavers from our two neighboring countries - Bulgaria and Greece appear to be an extremely good and remarkable example. One of essential arguments for the above statement is, that until recently the two countries used to belong to completely different social and political systems, including two opposite military blocks – bearers of the Cold war politics. What is more, in spite of the fact that both countries are situated on the Balkan Peninsula (which presupposes that we have close national identity, in historical context they speak two different languages and develop two different cultures – the Greek and the Slavic-Bulgarian). These differences, as you will see later, did not have visible influence over the development of the contacts between the speleological organizations of the two countries. If even there is such negative influence, this probably relates only to the period 1967–1974, due to the specific political situation in Greece and Bulgaria at that time.

Today, after 40 years from the beginning of the active relations between the Bulgarian and Greek speleologists, we would like to recall the memories of the time when the first serious contacts were established. We would like also to make a historical review of the joint speleological initiatives, which can contribute to the further development of the cooperation and friendly relations between the speleologists from Bulgaria and Greece. We hope that this report will enlarge the knowledge about the history of speleology of our two neighboring countries.

The first known contact among Bulgarian and Greek speleologists dates back to 1965, when was carried out the constituent congress of the International Speleological Unit in Postojna, Jugoslavia (now Slovenia). During the congress meet the leader of that time of the Greek Speleological Association – Mrs. Anna Petrohilou and members of the Bulgarian delegation Prof. Dr. L. Dinev, R. Radushev and P. Trantteev. Probably this first contact leads to the participation of two Greek speleologists in the Second National Cave Assembly with international meeting – “Ponora-1965”, North Bulgaria.

Then follows almost 15-years pause, when are realized contacts only during the time of the following world speleological congresses.

An intensive development of contacts begins since the summer of 1979, when six Bulgarian speleologists are invited to participate in the Greek-Bulgarian expedition “Erimantos” (Pelopones, Greece), organized by the Hellenic Speleological Society. During the expedition are discovered and explored 9 caves and abysses in the mountain massive. Two months later in Bulgaria arrive the Greek speleologists K.Zoupis; J.Petrohilos; N.Zauahir; A. Bartsikas, who together with their Bulgarian

colleagues penetrate in the deepest cave in the country – Raichova dupka (-387 m), “Malkata Yama” (-205 m) and “Ianova voda” (-115 m). During these joint events are created strong friendly contacts between the Greek speleologist K.Zoupis and the Bulgarian V. Nedkov (who tragically passed away), V. Balevski and A. Zhalov. At the same time araised the idea to organize a joint expedition in the abyss Mavro Skiadi, Crete island (- 347 m). The expedition takes place in the next 1980 with participation of K.Zoupis, V. Nedkov, E. Koniari and N. Nedkova.

Even braver is the next joint event – the organizing of an expedition among members of Club “Speleo” – Athens and the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology in the abysses Epos and Provatina in the mountain of Timphi, Epiros. The expedition is realized in the autumn of 1984. The goal is reached – in the abyss Provatina penetrate V. Nedkov, L. Velichkova and V. Peltekov and the Greek colleagues K.Zoupis, P. Romanas and Y. Kasimatis. In Epos penetrate K.Zoupis and V. Nedkov, F. Filipov, V. Peltekov, M. Tranteev, T. Todorov and A. Zhalov. The common successes of the expedition have a favourable press in Greece and Bulgaria. The contacts between the cavers of the two countries become more active.

The next years are marked mainly with visits of Greek speleologists in Bulgaria, who took part in different cave activities. Meanwhile, in 1987, with the assistance of Greek colleagues is realized the second Bulgarian expedition in Epos and Provatina.

After few years of stagnation in the relationships between the speleological organizations, the joint activities continued by exchange of speleological groups between the cave club in the town of Gotse Delchev, Bulgaria and the sport-tourist club “Necropolis”, Athens. In this period the contacts of the speleologists from the both countries are informal and are based mainly on personal friendships. In this period, the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology presents to the colleagues from Club “Speleo” a rescue stretcher, which helps to develop the cave rescue activity in Greece.

After 1989 in Bulgaria begins a period of democratic social and political changes. The years of transition are difficult for the Bulgarian cavers. The country collapsed in economical crisis, which reflects negatively on the international contacts and activities of the Bulgarian cavers. In the autumn of the situation is critical – the shops are empty and was introduced a system of purchasing on coupons. Concerned about the situation, K.Zoupis and E. Koniary from club “Speleo” – Athens organized a charity action for their Bulgarian friends-cavers. At the Christmas Eve K.Zoupis personally arrived in Bulgaria and brings the purchased food products and gifts, proving in this way his sincere friendship to the Bulgarian colleagues and his wish to help in a difficult moment!

In the period 1998-2000 happens an interesting event, which later contributes to extending of the contacts among the speleologists of both countries. Lampros Makrosteris from the town of Karditsa, who was a student of the Sofia University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy, finishes the cave course in the club “Helictit”-Sofia and becomes its member.

The last period from the history of the Bulgarian-Speleological relations ranges over the years since 2002 till now. Its beginning is put by the participation of representatives of Hellenic Speleological Society and the newly established Hellenic Speleological Federation on the constituent meeting of the Balkan Speleological Union. As it is shown on the tables, below enclosed (Table 1 and 2), during the following years the contacts between the Greek and Bulgarian speleologists are developed intensively. They are made mainly through the HFS and BFS by exchange of visits on different occasions – expeditions, cave camps and cave rescue trainings. On the basis of the created contacts among the speleologists from the younger Bulgarian and Greek cavers generation begin new common projects. Significant in this context is the project for exploration of the border mountain Slavianka-Orvelos, organized by Bulgarian-Greek team of speleologists from HSS and cavers from different clubs-members of BFS. The friendly relations among the cavers of the older generation become deeper.

As it is known, the organized speleology in Bulgaria has more than 75-years history. In this period the Bulgarian speleologists has gained a lot of experience. The members of BFS are always ready to share their experience with the Greek colleagues and together to work for realization of ideas and projects of mutual interest. We hope, that soon between the two states the border will be just a

formality, which will contribute to the further enlargement of the cooperation between the Greek and Bulgarian cavers. Actually, the friendship does not recognize limits! The facts show, that if there are such limits, they are surmountable! If there is mutual wish for that!

Table 1

GREEK CAVERS IN BULGARIA

YEAR OF THE EVENT	EVENT NAME	GREEK PARTICIPANTS
1965	National Caving Camp - “Ponora”	2 cavers from HSS
21-27 September, 1979	National Training Camp - “Dobrostan - Troyan”	K.Zoupis; J.Petrohilos; N.Zauahir; A. Bartsikas from HSS
1981		Eleni Koniari , K.Zoupis - HSS
4-9 May, 1985	Cave Rescue Camp “Kotel”	Petros Romanas, Spyros Georgiou, Jiannis Kasimatis, Kostas Zoupis, Giorgos Lagis
7-17 May, 1986	Cave Rescue Camp “Vraca”, Scientific conference “Karlukovo”	P.Romanas: D.Kobiliris - “SPELEO”
21-27 October, 1988	Ist International School for Security and Cave Rescue	P. Romanas - “SPELEO”
1991	International Conference of Cave Rescue - Vratza	Kostas Thocharides
1996	Expedition “Gotse Delchev” – Rhodopi	10 cavers from sport-tourist club “Necropolis” Athens
2002	Balkan Speleological Meeting	K.Zoupis, K.Adamopoulos
2003	Expedition “Pirin-2003”	K.Zoupis ; D.Zoupis, A.Zoupis, E.Koniari - “SPELEO” - HSF
2003	Cave Rescue Camp - Troyan	S.Nikolaidis, N.Mitsakis, J.Demis, J. Chatzi A. Christodoulu, HSF
2004	National Cavers Camp – Karlukovo	L.Makrosterios - “ S-OK”- Kardica
2004	Expedition “Slavianka”	M.Vaxevanopoulos, B.Kokkala. S.Alichanidis. I.Salvarina, G.Salonikidou, E.Tsaganou - HSS
2005	Expedition “Duhlata”	M.Vaxevanopoulos, A.Tsianka and “Heiron-2004”- Volos

Table 2**BULGARIAN CAVERS IN GREECE**

YEAR OF THE EVENT	EVENT NAME	BULGARIAN PARTICIPANTS
1979	Expedition “Erimantos” organized by ESE	R.Rahnev, A.Zhalov, V.Balevski, V.Nedkov, N.Gaidarov, V.Balevski
1980	Expedition ‘Mavro Skiadi’	V.Nedkov, N.Nedkova
1984	Expedition “Epos &Provatina”	A.Zhalov. V.Nedkov, V.Peltekov, M.Tranteev, L.Velichkova, T.Todorov, F.Filipov
3 August-15 September, 1987	Expedition “Epos &Provatina”	10 cavers from SC “Urvich”-Sofia
1995	Expedition “Pelopones”	6 cavers from SC”Prilep”-G.Delchev
2003	Camp “Maara-2003”	P.Beron, T.Daaliev, A.Pencheva, I.Lichkov, N.Orlov , I.Radeva, R.Radeva, G.Radev and others
26 September-19 October, 2003	Greek-French-Bulgarian Expedition “Timfi”	D.Dimitrov, N.Orlov, I.Radeva, R.Radeva, G.Radev
2003	Balkan Speleological Expedition “Othris”	M.Stamenova , P.Beron, A.Zhalov, K.Stoichkov, K.Kasabov, Zh. Petrov, L.Marinov
2003	National Meeting of Greek cavers “Diros”	A. Zhalov
1-2 May, 2004	Cave Rescue Training	Tr.Daaliev, R.Vatev, V.Stanev, G.Staichev, T.Kisimov
2005	Expedition “Orvilos”	K.Stoichkov. V.Drobenov. I.Lichkov, P.Pavlov, A.Janev, S.Petkov, Y.Moskov.
2005	Kardica	A.Zhalov, M.Stamenova